

DO YOU NEED TO BE ENROLLED IN THE VOLUNTARY SCRAPIE FLOCK CERTIFICATION PROGRAM?

by Deb Hopkins

This question has been asked several times over the past few years by breeders and many of you have decided not to be in the program. I am now recommending to you, look at the program again because there are many hidden benefits that you may not have considered.

The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program has been in existence for several years. Many breeders had not opted for the program when it first came out because breeders did not want to be inspected on an annual basis by state and federal vet officials, they didn't want the additional expense to participate in the program by purchasing eartags and providing barriers at shows/sales, they didn't want to carry the extra identification on an animal, they didn't want to be bothered with the extra record keeping required and incur the cost of extra labor involved. Well, guess what. With the mandatory federal identification tag program since being instituted, you have to do most of these requirements anyway while reaping none of the benefits of the voluntary flock certification program.

The benefits are as follows:

-Establish a relationship with your federal and state vet officials: While many think this is bad, for many it has been a positive experience and has developed a working relationship with the vet officials which can only benefit the breeder in other situations that develop like tracebacks. If state and federal vets have a history with your flock, it does help with the process because both parties involved know each other beforehand and they do look upon enrolled flocks as progressive breeders in dealing with the scrapie issue. If you are also DNA genotyping your animals and additions to your flock to monitor the scrapie susceptibility of your animals that is also a plus.

-Makes one keep an accurate record of animal movement on/off the premises, animal inventory and identification: Record keeping is a necessary evil for modern livestock producers and the program assists breeders in this process by having to provide accurate records for the annual inspections. These records then become very valuable in others aspects of the operation with registering animals, doing farm taxes and making farm management decisions.

-Benefit of interstate movement even if your state does not meet federal requirements: There was a situation a couple of years ago with some of the states being non-compliant with federal regs and the movement of sheep was restricted to with-in state only UNLESS you were enrolled in the voluntary certification program. If you were not on the program one was not able to move animals out of state to market, sales, or shows thus limiting your viability of marketing your product.

-Benefit of being able to export live animals out of the country: With the Canadian border opening up once again for live sheep importation your flock needs to be enrolled in the program in order to be eligible to send animals to Canada.

-Government provided ear tags are now free: The excuse of the extra cost has been eliminated as the government issued tags are now free and the tags are good quality. You still have the option to get the tag of choice as long as they are approved as tamper proof by the program standards, which encompasses many types of tags.

Another major reason why breeders didn't like the program was because they couldn't introduce outside genetics into their breeding programs without losing their status. Status refers to the process of becoming a certified free scrapie flock in five years. Since the program's inception the process of introducing rams has been relaxed making it much easier for many breeders to get certified while still gaining the advantage of outside genetic introduction. Many breeders that are enrolled never have the intention of ever getting certified because they still feel the need to introduce outside females to maintain or upgrade the quality of their flock but they are still able to reap the benefits of the program as mentioned earlier.

To get enrolled into the program the best route is to contact your area APHIS (Animal Plant Health Inspection Service) Office. It will be listed under the USDA in your phone book. They will get you going in the right direction. Each state does have a State Certification Board that will need to approve your enrollment application. That date of approval will become your initial status date. A completed application includes an application form filled out with basic information, a flock inventory

that includes the official ID numbers among other base information, and your first inspection report by the state and or federal official. The inspection report involves verifying the id on the animals and a statement that there are no animals in the flock exhibiting signs consistent with scrapie on the date of inspection.

There is a program brochure available that outlines the complete program from APHIS that was updated June 30, 2007. The publication number is 91-55-091. If you are seriously considering enrolling in the program I would get a copy of this publication and read it. After reading it, if you have any questions about implementation of the program talk with the state and/or federal vet officials in your area. You can also contact other breeders in your area that are on program and get their opinions on program implementation. The reason why I am saying this is, like with many federal programs, the interpretation of the program requirements is left up to the local federal/state officials in the area. No matter how uniform they make the rules and regulations, it is just a reality that there are a number of different officials responsible for implementing this program and slight differences will occur depending with whom you are dealing with.

In summary, if your flock is not in the voluntary scrapie program, perhaps it is time for you re-evaluate. Depending on your flock production goals it maybe the time to take a more serious look at the program and reap the benefits it can provide you.

2008 PENNSYLVANIA RAM TEST PROGRAM

The 2007 Pennsylvania Ram Test in Pennsylvania Furnace, PA will be accepting nominations up until March 15, 2008. There are categories for fall and spring born rams. Preference is given to Pennsylvania breeders first and then to out of state breeders. There are requirements for entry including a minimum 50-day weight ratio, meeting acceptable standards for conformation, disease free with accompanying health papers. Qualified rams that make it to the end of the test period will be offered for sale at the performance ram test sale August 2 and will include an invitational ewe sale.

For more information please feel free to contact:

Penn. Livestock Evaluation Center, Telephone: 814-238-2527 email: geberly@state.pa.us

2008 ILLINOIS/MIDWEST RAM TEST PROGRAM : IT'S TEST TIME

The 2008 Illinois Ram Test announced test dates for its 84 and 63 day tests at Western Illinois University in Macomb, IL. Arrival dates for the 84 day test will be March 22 and arrival date for the 63 date test will be April 12. The date of the sale will be July 12, 2008. For more information contact: Mark Hoge, (309)298-2537, e-mail: MD-Hoge@wiu.edu

